

**National Science Foundation  
Office of the Director  
Arlington, VA 22230**

**Notice No. 135**

**December 11, 2013**

**IMPORTANT NOTICE TO PRESIDENTS OF UNIVERSITIES AND  
COLLEGES AND HEADS OF OTHER NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
AWARDEE ORGANIZATIONS**

**Subject: Transparency and Accountability at NSF**

As a public agency, the National Science Foundation builds and sustains trust for our mission through the transparency of our processes and the accountability of our organization. Periodically, as a learning organization committed to continuous improvement, we review our processes to ensure that they continue to engender this trust. A recent review by NSF senior leadership in consultation with the National Science Board affirmed our fundamental principles and identified opportunities for improvements in two areas to enhance our public stewardship.

One area is our accountability for ensuring that our investment decisions support the national interest, defined by NSF's mission "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity and welfare; to secure the national defense..." To strengthen this alignment, our directorates and offices are examining process improvements for defining research priorities and objectives at all levels of the organization and at all stages of merit review. As a result, the community should benefit from greater understanding and knowledge of the priorities and objectives of our research programs. We would certainly welcome the community's thoughts and suggestions in this regard.

A second area is communications regarding our investment decisions. In the current fiscal environment, it is more important than ever to justify the expenditure of public funding. We believe we can enhance our public communications of what we are funding and why it is important. The immediate focus will be on improving our research abstracts, ensuring these primary sources of public information clearly articulate the broader context and funding justification. While our program officers are responsible for preparing abstracts, this often involves input from principal investigators, and so we will be directly engaging the community in this effort. Of course, one of the most effective outreach mechanisms for improved communication is through our community, and we look forward to working with you as we identify other mechanisms to strengthen our public message.

From an implementation perspective, our efforts may result in the adoption of new policies and improved processes, which we will share with the community. We expect that, over time, this increased focus on transparency and accountability will improve our processes, strengthen our research programs, enhance our communications and advance the national interest.

Thank you for your continuing support for NSF and the nation's science and engineering research and education enterprise.

Cora Marrett  
Acting Director